

lot of outstanding men and women coming out of the Judiciary very soon, and we will work quickly to move them out of this Chamber and onto the bench.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

#### STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this evening, President Biden will begin the back half of his term with his State of the Union address to Congress and to the American people. But the White House's attempts to script the message for this week have been upset by recent events. Over the last several days, the country learned that on President Biden's watch, the state of our Union is apparently under Chinese surveillance from our own skies.

It is ludicrous to suggest that Canada and the United States had no choice but to let this thing traipse across the continent from coast to coast. President Obama's own Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta, says, "We should have acted earlier."

The administration's handwringing and indecision, finally downing the balloon only after it had toured the length of our country, was typical of how President Biden and his team have conducted our foreign affairs.

Our top military commanders and civilian experts all say that our broader strategic competition with China is our most serious challenge. But this President's last budget request tried to cut funding for our military after inflation, while Beijing keeps investing in their own capabilities.

The commander of our U.S. Strategic Command just told Congress that China now has more land-based intercontinental ballistic missile launchers than we do. The administration's reckless retreat from Afghanistan blew past the expert warnings, cost the lives of 13 American servicemembers, let thousands of terrorists waltz out of prison, and incentivize others to challenge an America that looked cowardly.

Its hesitating, indecisive, self-deterred approach to helping Ukraine before Putin invaded and in the earliest days right afterwards left freedom's friends flat-footed and are making the substantive fight more difficult than it ever had to be.

And now the Biden administration apparently has pivoted from chasing another bad nuclear deal with Iran to trying to let terrorists out of Guantanamo Bay.

These are just some of the reasons why 41 percent of Americans say the state of our union is weak—weak—and only 13 percent say it is strong.

Of course, this administration has also created problems for American families closer to home. A nationwide poll published last week revealed that just 16 percent of Americans say they are in a better financial situation today than they were 2 years ago when the President and his party assumed total control of government.

For 84 percent of Americans, one-party Democratic control of Washington either failed to live up to its promises or actively made life worse. Two years ago, over the objections of their own party's top economists, Washington Democrats misinterpreted a narrow election victory as a mandate for an unprecedented spending spree.

When President Biden took office, inflation was at 1.4 percent. From Inauguration Day to today, inflation is over 13 percent.

Working families have seen grocery prices jump 18.6 percent, used car prices rise 26.2 percent, and energy prices soar by 33.9 percent. Millions—millions—of Americans have earned pay raises at work, but runaway inflation has left them with less purchasing power than before.

Our southern border is in crisis, shattering all-time records for illegal immigrant apprehensions. Streets and neighborhoods are being swallowed up by violent crime—after local Democrats have cut police budgets, liberal prosecutors have turned jails into revolving doors, and national Democrats spent years amplifying the kinds of anti-police rhetoric that result in more crime.

And President Biden is helping the radical left go on offense and bring a culture war to the doorsteps of normal American families—trying to squeeze Catholic hospitals and faith-based daycares out of business; trying to take school choice and curriculum transparency away from parents—and on and on and on.

President Biden campaigned on being the adult in the room. But he is not even calling the shots in his own party. Over and over on issue after issue, this President hands the car keys to the radical left and turned himself into a passenger. That is why working families across the country have voted for change.

They elected a Republican majority in the House of Representatives to put the emergency brakes on runaway liberal spending. They reelected all-star Republican governors in places like Texas, Georgia, and Florida. And they elevated a talented new generation of leaders, including the youngest serving governor in America—Governor Sanders of Arkansas—whom the American people will hear from tonight.

Our country may still be struggling to understand what on earth Washington Democrats think they have actually accomplished in the past 2 years. But they can be absolutely sure where Republicans stand.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of DeAndrea Gist Benjamin, of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### COVID

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, when the COVID pandemic hit, small businesses were shut down; millions of Americans lost their jobs; schools were shut down; flights were canceled; and traveling ground to a halt. The sick and the elderly were forced to die in hospitals and nursing homes, tragically alone, without the comforting embrace of loved ones.

The corporate media told us there was no way that this virus could have escaped from a Chinese Government lab, and Big Tech companies banned and censored posts laying out the evidence that it had escaped from a Chinese lab, labeling that evidence a "conspiracy theory." Masks were mandated everywhere.

And when the COVID vaccines came out, those were mandated too. Doctors, nurses, and our brave service men and women who chose not to get the vaccine were fired, discharged, sent home.

The corrupt corporate media's reaction to COVID devastated our economy and led directly to massive inflation, to weakening and even destroying faith in public health institutions, and resulted in learning loss that millions of American children may never recover from.

The pandemic is over. President Biden has even admitted that. The vast majority of America has moved on with their lives. But, sadly, the Biden